

VZCZCXRO7670
OO RUEHCHI RUEHDT RUEHHM RUEHNH
DE RUEHGO #0048/01 0221053
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 221053Z JAN 08
FM AMEMBASSY RANGOON
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7070
INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 0850
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 1694
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA 4734
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 4410
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 7941
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 5502
RUEHCN/AMCONSUL CHENGDU 1319
RUEHCHI/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI 1344
RUEHCI/AMCONSUL KOLKATA 0186
RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHDC
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 3474
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 1290
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 RANGOON 000048

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP/MLS;
PACOM FOR FPA
TREASURY FOR OASIA: SCHUN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/22/2018

TAGS: [EAID](#) [ECON](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [BM](#)

SUBJECT: NGOS UNCONCERNED WITH RENEWED REGIME INTEREST

RANGOON 00000048 001.2 OF 003

Classified By: Economic Officer Samantha A. Carl-Yoder for Reasons 1.4
(b and d)

¶1. (C) Summary. During a January 11 meeting in Nay Pyi Taw with local officials from international NGOs, the Ministry of Health reiterated that organizations must work within the NGO guidelines and coordinate with government officials on projects and programs. NGO expatriate staff, who must be accompanied by government officials on all official travel, should limit their travel around the country or combine travel with other expatriates. Those applying for visas, either renewals of existing visas for long-term stay or short-term travel visas, should apply at least eight weeks in advance and provide detailed information on purpose of travel. The GOB also requested that NGOs use existing health data rather than conducting new surveys or assessments. Ministry officials did not require NGOs to register with the government, but reminded them to renew Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) with the appropriate ministries and complete program reporting in a timely fashion. NGO officials, confident that renewed GOB interest will wane, do not believe that these instructions will affect their ability to provide humanitarian assistance. NGOs plan to renew their MOUs and conduct business as usual. End Summary.

Government Interest in Health

¶2. (C) On January 11, the Ministry of Health summoned local officials from international NGOs providing health assistance to a coordination meeting in Nay Pyi Taw. The Ministry stressed that expatriate staff should not attend because the meeting would be held in Burmese rather than English. Burmese nationals from more than twenty of the thirty health-related NGOs working in Burma attended the meeting; certain NGOs such as MSF-Holland (AZG) refused to send staff.

Deputy Director General of Health San Shwe Win emphasized to the NGO staff that the Ministry of Health wanted "to build mutual trust and narrow the communication gaps" between the GOB and the NGO community. San Shwe Win offered suggestions for NGO operations in six areas:

--Memorandum of Understanding: NGOs should continue to work under the existing NGO guidelines. NGOs should renew MOUs with appropriate Ministries, ensuring that all programs are listed in the document. MOUs are now valid for only one year. MOU extensions should begin six months before the expiration date. NGOs can continue programs when the MOU expires, provided that they have begun the MOU renewal process.

--Travel: The Ministry of Health recommends that expatriate staff working with international NGOs limit their travel around the country or combine travel with other expatriates. Expatriates working with international NGOs must continue traveling with government liaison officers on all official travel. All expatriate staff must request travel permission two weeks in advance and submit a detailed itinerary. Local NGO staff do not need to travel with government officials. NGOs are now required to pay all travel expenses for government officials accompanying them, including round-trip airfare between Nay Pyi Taw, Rangoon, and the final destination, as well as meals and incidentals.

--Visas: Expatriate staff should submit visa renewals and CVs at least eight weeks before the expiration date of their visas. Expatriate visitors should apply for their visas at least eight weeks before the proposed travel dates. Visa applications should include specific information on travel plans, where the visitor will be staying, and what the visitor will be doing. NGOs should try to limit their visa

RANGOON 00000048 002.2 OF 003

requests for foreign visitors.

--Surveys and Assessments: NGOs working in the health sector should try to minimize the necessity for new surveys and assessments and should utilize existing information. All surveys and assessments must be approved by the Ministry of Health. If an assessment is to include non-health information, the NGO should obtain prior approval from the Ministry or Department concerned. NGOs that plan to conduct long-term surveys in the fields should utilize their local staff rather than expatriates. All information should be shared with the Ministry of Health.

--Reports: All NGOs should submit their 2007 annual report by January 31, 2008. Additionally, the Deputy Minister of Health requires that NGOs submit a five-year report by the end of January 2008, which should include details on expenditures, activities, achievements, and challenges.

--General: Instead of expanding to new geographic areas, NGOs should focus on strengthening existing programs. NGOs should spend at least 60 percent of their program budgets on items that would directly benefit the Burmese, rather than spending it on salaries and travel. The Ministry of Health will hold coordination meetings every four months; the next meeting will be in May.

13. (C) Although the Ministry of Health highlighted the NGO guidelines, it did not raise the issue of NGO registration. It instead encouraged NGOs to establish and renew MOUs with the proper ministries, emphasizing that NGOs with non-health related programs should negotiate MOUs with other ministries to cover those programs. Under the MOUs, each NGO is required to submit annual and quarterly reports to the appropriate ministry about each program. All NGOs working in Burma have met this requirement since 2006.

NGO Response

¶4. (C) We met with officials from CARE, Save the Children, Population Services International (PSI), and several UN agencies to discuss their views on the January 11 meeting. None of the NGOs viewed the meeting as one of real consequence. PSI Country Director John Hetherington told us that GOB interest in NGO activities "goes in waves." The regime may monitor NGO activities for a few months and then shift their attention to other issues, he stated. Indeed, the Minister of Health told UNAIDS Coordinator Brian Williams that the new leadership, Secretary (1) Lt. General Thiha Thura Tin Aung Myint Oo and Prime Minister Lt. General Thein Sein, were taking this opportunity to remind NGOs that they need permission to work in Burma. The Minister concluded that NGOs should not worry, as Secretary (1) and the Prime Minister would lose interest in a few months.

¶5. (C) In the meantime, NGOs have decided to continue business as usual and plan to ignore some of the GOB's more outlandish requests. Several NGOs, such as PSI and MSF-Holland, are pursuing two-year MOUs with the Ministry of Health rather than one-year agreements. Save the Children official Guy Cave told us that many NGOs are inserting plans for surveys and assessments into their MOUs with the Ministry of Health. The Minister, Cave said, understands that NGOs need updated health statistics to monitor their programs and will allow them to conduct research. According to Cave, the Minister's concern is that the international community not use the information against the government, as the UN did in its press releases in October. NGOs agree that sharing the information with the Ministry of Health is not a burden, and may even help establish a dialogue between donors and the

RANGOON 00000048 003.2 OF 003

government.

¶6. (C) Currently, none of the NGOs with which we spoke plan to register with the government, as they are unwilling to provide detailed information about their staff to the regime. The Minister of Health will not push the issue, Hetherington told us, because he values the health assistance that NGOs provide and understands the NGO community's reservations about registration. As long as NGOs have valid MOUs, they can continue their programs. None of the health-related NGOs have had any problem renewing their MOUs, Hetherington told us. Hetherington, like other NGO officials believes that NGOs can successfully operate in Burma and provide people with the humanitarian assistance they need, despite GOB involvement.

¶7. (C) CARE Country Director Brian Agland told us that the Burmese Government's requirements for NGOs were very similar to those of other Asian countries. He did not view the requirements as onerous, noting that NGOs working in Burma has been following most of them for the past two years. For example, foreign NGO workers have always had to travel with a government official, with the NGO picking up the cost of government travel. Now, instead of just paying for travel costs from Rangoon, NGOs must cover costs of government officials traveling from Nay Pyi Taw. This may place more of a financial burden on some NGOs, Agland acknowledged, although most NGOs send local staff to monitor projects rather than expatriates.

Comment

¶8. (C) Reports that the regime has tightened regulations on NGOs appear to be premature. NGO officials do not view the latest GOB interest in their activities as significant and believe they can continue their programs without any problems. Most of the NGOs in Burma rely heavily on their local staff rather than on expatriates to conduct surveys, monitor projects, and travel around the country. Through them, NGOs and international organizations gain insights into what is really happening in Burma, not just in the health

sector, but all sectors. Limiting the ability of foreigners to travel in Burma will not prevent international organizations from conducting research and gathering news on the ground. NGOs, like other organizations in Burma, will continue to adapt to the Government's demands and continue to provide humanitarian assistance to those in need.

VILLAROSA